

Festive Facts from the Fabulous Fifties (and Sixties) December 12

As the upcoming holidays loom around the corner and Agency employees and their organizations prepare for morale building activities, it's fun to reminisce about Agency holiday practices of yesteryear.

NOTE: This article quotes a number of sources from the 1950s; before NSA's collective consciousness was raised, year-end holiday functions were almost invariably referred to as "Christmas" parties or events. The CCH wishes "Merry Christmas" to those who celebrate this holiday and also passes its best year-end holiday wishes to those who do not.

Did you know that back in the Fabulous Fifties and Swinging Sixties...

...NSA employees could pick up "flame-proofed Christmas trees" for office parties?



(U//FOUO) Arlington Hall Station Firehouse

In 1953, the Arlington Hall Station (AHS) Civilian Welfare Council announced it would purchase and supply Christmas trees to all requesting units at AHS, the School (i.e., a predecessor to the National Cryptologic School), and the Navy Security Station (NSS).

Divisions and staff sections would indicate their requirements and be issued a ticket. The bearer of the ticket would be authorized to pick up a tree—flame-proofed prior to distribution per AHS regulations—from the AHS firehouse. All trees, however, had to be removed from the building prior to Christmas Eve at 1730 and taken home or left at a designated location to be picked up by the Arlington Country community Chest for Distribution to needy families.

...NSA employees could bring in radios, phonographs, and wire recorders for holiday festivities?

In 1955, NSA employees at Arlington Hall Station (i.e., “AHS merry-makers”) were reminded that those who wanted to bring in radios, phonographs, and wire recorders (predecessors to the tape recorder) for the “blowout” on the last working day before Christmas, which happened to be on December 23 that year, had to submit a written request to the AHS post commander. Those who neglected to submit a request to carry such equipment onto AHS grounds from the outside were warned that they would meet with strong military police resistance.

...NSA employees were entitled to “Fun Funds” twice a year for morale-building activities?

Back in 1963, all NSA personnel were entitled to a (whopping!) \$0.25 per person, twice a year, toward the cost of a mid-season activity and a Christmas party. The “Fun Funds,” as they were called, were provided via the Civilian Welfare Fund Council and had to be requested via a newly established (at least as of July 1963) Memorandum Request Form. [Note: According to dollartimes.com, 25 cents in 1963 is equal to about \$2.03 in 2018, even factoring in the cost of inflation. That might buy you in 2018 one large bottle of iced tea in the Agency vending machine with three cents left over.]

...NSA employees were authorized up to 1.5 hours for a Christmas party held during work time?

In December 1952, DIRNSA established a designated 1.5 hours, specifically from 1500-1630 hours on Wednesday, December 24, for Christmas parties, at least within the Office of Operations. Post regulations specified that no Christmas decorations could remain in the working areas over the holidays. Fast forward to December 1969: Christmas parties could be held on any day between December 17 and 24, presumably for those working in Operations as well. The period in which Christmas decorations could be displayed at work was extended until

December 31. Guidance regarding type and size of decorations, gifts, and annual leave was outlined in "Holiday Activities," Personnel Management Bulletin No. 18-1969.

502 Caption: A white building with two large open doors, and fire engines parked halfway out of the building.